A

SERMON

ON THE SUBJECT OF

THE SLAVE TRADE;

DELIVERED TO A SOCIETY OF

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

AT THE

NEW MEETING, IN BIRMINGHAM;

AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

— And hath made of one blood all nations of men
to dwell on all the face of the earth.

Acts xvii. 26.

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THE

PREFACE.

I Publiſh this diſcourſe not only in compliance with the requeſt of a ſociety of chriſtians whom I think myſelf happy in every opportunity of obliging, but alſo becauſe I thought that ſome of the arguments on which I have inſiſted had not been ſufficiently urged by other writers on the ſame ſubject, and at the ſame time to evince my readineſs to join with chriſtians of all denominations in what appears to me to be right and juſt.

With the greateſt ſatisfaction ſhould I always *go with the multitude*, if a regard to the ſacred rights of *truth* did not, on ſome occaſions, forbid it. Happy it is, however, that there are ſome caſes in which almoſt all who are truly conſcientious, and who

feel the influence of humane and chriſtian ſentiments, will concur. May this beget a perſuaſion, that we *may* be equally conſcientious, and moved by a regard to what we deem to be the genuine intereſts of chriſtianity, in thoſe things on which we differ; and that though different intereſts and connexions may, unknown to ourſelves, give us different ſentiments, views, and purſuits; the time will come when this undue influence will ceaſe, and we ſhall be able calmly to trace the true ſource and effects of it. And as this is only the infancy of our being, it may be preſumed, that what we obſerve and experience here, may be an uſeful leſſon to us in our future progreſs.

With reſpect to the melancholy ſcene that is now before us, we muſt content ourſelves with ſaying, that the ways of God are *a great deep*, and *his footſteps in the mighty waters*, not to be traced by us, at leaſt at preſent. But we are ſufficiently authorized to add, that *though clouds and darkneſs are*

round about him, righteouſneſs and judgment are ever the habitation of his throne. Unleſs this maxim be deeply impreſſed upon our minds, and made familiar to us by frequent meditation, we muſt, if we reflect at all, be ſtaggered with a view of the vices, as well as the miſeries, which it ſeems wiſe and right in Divine Providence to permit on this wide theatre of the world.

As we cannot ſay what evils are uſeful in the general plan, or to what height they may ſafely and uſefully riſe (this being far above our comprehenſion) it cannot be our duty to imitate the Divine Being in this part of his conduct. But as we are ſatisfied that all evil is ultimately ſubſervient to good, and that it is the intention of Providence finally to exterminate all evil; in this moſt delightful employment we may, and ought, as his own children, to act like God; exerting ourſelves, by every means in our power, to remove the prejudices, correct the errors, cure the vices, and relieve the diſtreſſes, of our fellow creatures. In ex-

ertions of this kind, our motives are pure, pious, and benevolent. We feel as we are are conſcious we ought to do; and with whatever *ſucceſs* it may pleaſe God to crown our endeavours, we ſhall enjoy the ſatiſfaction of *having endeavoured*, and our *labour will not* wholly *be in vain*.

In this view it muſt give every good man an unſpeakable pleaſure to ſee the general intereſt that is now taken in behalf of the Negro ſlaves. It makes us think better of our countrymen, and of mankind. Ill as ſome think of the world, and of the human race, there are in it many noble characters; and if it was the object of the great ſcheme of Providence, as no doubt it was, to form ſuch characters, the end of all we ſee, and ſometimes complain of, has been completely anſwered; and if ſcenes of difficulty and diſtreſs have, in any meaſure, contributed to form ſuch characters, as undoubtedly they have, we muſt conclude that, ſhocking as they appear to us, they have not been introduced into the ſyſtem in vain.

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Looking at the *tree*, we may think it ill-ſhaped, and diſguſting; but conſidering the *fruit*, we muſt approve and admire it.

I alſo conſider the exertions that are now making with us, and which are likely to be adopted in other chriſtian countries, as an honour to *chriſtianity*. For no ſuch generous ſentiments were ever found, and no ſuch exertions were ever made, by heathens. We have juſter ideas of the dignity of human nature, and of the common rights of humanity, than heathens ever had. At the ſame time that we juſtly think that every man is a great and exalted being (*i. e.* capable of becoming ſuch) we conſider all diſtinctions among men as temporary, calculated for the ultimate benefit of all; and conſequently that it is for the intereſt of the loweſt orders, as well as of the higheſt, that ſuch a ſubordination ſhould ſubſiſt. But with this perſuaſion all chriſtian maſters will reſpect and love their ſervants and dependants, and will think it their duty to make their ſituation as eaſy and happy as poſſible;

conſidering them as *brothers*, and *equals*, in one, and that the moſt important ſenſe, while they treat them as *inferiors* in another; and as thoſe who will even rank above them in another ſtate, if they acquit themſelves better in this.

Theſe are juſt, noble, and elevating ſentiments, peculiar to believers in revealed religion; and they are common to *all* believers. We find them among papiſts, as well as proteſtants, and among thoſe who are favoured by civil eſtabliſhments of chriſtianity, as well as thoſe that are frowned upon by them. And theſe ſentiments will always be found among all chriſtians in proportion to the *attention* they give to the great truths of our common religion; by which I mean the doctrines of a God, of a Providence, and of a future ſtate. Theſe great truths have the advantage of being level to the meaneſt capacity. A child may underſtand them. And, at the ſame time all that the wiſeſt among us can attain to farther, adds but

little to their practical influence. Let theſe conſiderations teach the different ſects of chriſtians mutual candour, as reflections on the difference of ranks among men ſhould teach us humility and moderation.

Were we truly ſenſible of the ineſtimable value of truly chriſtian principles, and felt the influence of them, all chriſtians would reſpect one another *as ſuch*; and, compared with this great article of agreement, make leſs account of thoſe in which they differ. When I was at Paris, a prieſt of the Catholic communion, diſtinguiſhed for his piety and benevolence, as well as a taſte for ſcience, embraced me with tears when he found that I uniformly avowed myſelf to be a chriſtian; ſaying I was the only perſon he had met with, pretending to philoſophy, who did ſo. I told him that I was indeed a chriſtian, but ſuch as he would call a great *heretic*. He replied, "No matter, you "are a chriſtian." Such magnanimity as this, I have no opportunity of ſhowing, and might not be capable of. For no man

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can anſwer for his own feelings and conduct in new ſituations. There is a degree of abhorrence and contempt, with which the members of great and old eſtabliſhments, like that of the church of Rome, are apt to regard *ſectaries*, which the ſectaries do not feel for them. The reaſon is, that the members of an eſtabliſhment know much leſs of ſectaries than ſectaries do of them. Thus the Heathens had a much worſe opinion of chriſtians, while they were ſectaries, than the chriſtians had of them. They were conſidered in ſo deſpicable a light by many, that it was not thought worth while to make any inquiry into the truth of the ſcandalous reports concerning them. The ſhocking picture that is given of *Turlupins*, *Beghards*, and other denominations of the reformed, before the time of Luther, may be ſeen in any eccleſiaſtical hiſtory.

How my excellent Pariſian friend would have felt if he had known the full extent of my preſent hereſy I cannot tell. Others, however, of his communion are well ap-

prized of it, without thinking the worſe of me, in a moral reſpect, on that account. Of ſuch men as theſe chriſtianity may juſtly make her boaſt. In all, however, we muſt make allowance for human frailties, from which no men, not even the apoſtles, were exempt.

With reſpect to the *facts* mentioned in this diſcourſe, I can only ſay that I was far from wiſhing to exaggerate any thing; but have taken them from ſuch accounts as appeared to me to be the moſt to be depended upon; and as the tracts from which I collected them are in very common circulation, I have no occaſion to quote any of them. Under humane maſters, ſlaves may, no doubt, enjoy a certain degree of happineſs; but ſtill they are ſlaves, ſubject to the wills, and conſequently the caprices, of others; and there is no proper ſecurity from the greateſt outrages, but in the protection of *law*.

I am happy to hear ſince this Diſcourſe was ſent to the preſs, that one planter, who employs a very great number of ſlaves, has had

had no occaſion to purchaſe any freſh ones theſe twenty years. This may convince us that a ſtoppage of the importation would not be a great hardſhip upon the planters in general. It would only compel them to find their own intereſt in treating their ſlaves well, and in favouring their propagation.

On the other hand, I muſt add that I have been informed by a perſon who reſided in Jamaica, that it is uſual for the ſlaves, after they are purchaſed, to ſhudder at the ſight of a fire, or kitchen utenſils, imagining that they are to be killed and eaten, till older ſlaves convince them that nothing of that kind is intended. What the poor creatures muſt ſuffer with this idea on their minds all the voyage, and the terror it muſt impreſs on the country in general, in which thouſands who are never taken know they are liable to it, is not to be eſtimated, and for which no good treatment of ſlaves can compenſate. This is what a *brute* cannot be made to ſuffer, and ſhews how improper and unnatural this trafficking with the *human ſpecies* muſt be.

Which of theſe three, thinkeſt thou, was neighbour to him that fell among the thieves? And he ſaid, he that ſhewed mercy unto him. Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, Go thou and do likewiſe.

LUKE x. 36, 37.

My chriſtian brethren,

I DO not know whether it be more in the character of *men*, or in that of *chriſtians*, that I ſhall now take the liberty to addreſs you. But if you feel as becomes either, you cannot but ſympathize with the miſerable and oppreſſed of the human race, how remote ſoever they be from yourſelves in every other reſpect. You will conſider all mankind as *brethren*, and *neighbours*, intitled to every good office that it may be in your power to render them. As men, and as chriſtians, obſervant of the inſtructions of our great maſter in my text, we ſhould intereſt ourſelves not only for our relations, and particular friends; not only for our

countrymen; not only for Europeans, but for the diſtreſſed inhabitants of Aſia, Africa, or America; and not only for chriſtians, but for Jews, Mahometans, and Infidels. And as we ought to feel for our fellow men, we ought, to the utmoſt extent of our influence, to exert ourſelves to relieve their diſtreſſes.

Does not, then, the caſe of the African Negroes, who have long been unjuſtly enſlaved, and have been made to ſuffer numberleſs miſeries, the leaſt of which is mere ſervitude, in our Weſt Indies, deſerve our compaſſion, and loudly call for our friendly interpoſition in their favour? And ſurely they are not the leſs intitled to it becauſe their oppreſſors are our countrymen, and becauſe we have derived, or have imagined that we have derived, benefit from their oppreſſion. Now, then, that it has pleaſed God, who, for reaſons juſt and wiſe, no doubt (becauſe ſuch is his character) but often unſearchable by us, permits the riſe and progreſs of all the evils that we ſee and lament, has awakened the attention of many

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in our nation to this great and growing enormity, and to intereſt great numbers in favour of the unhappy ſufferers; let not us be the laſt, though we cannot have the honour of being the firſt, to join heartily in the meaſures that are now taking for their relief; it being propoſed to recommend their caſe to the conſideration of parliament the preſent ſeſſion, and the friends of the meaſure thinking that a general application from all parts of the country, and eſpecially from towns of note like this, will tend to promote it, and almoſt enſure its ſucceſs.

Thoroughly to intereſt you, and to engage your warmeſt zeal in the cauſe, nothing, my brethren, I am confident, will be requiſite, beſides ſtating the ſimple *facts*; of the magnitude of which few perſons, not perſonally concerned in this traffic of the human ſpecies, and the treatment to which ſlaves are ſubject, are ſufficiently apprized. Indeed, had the ſhocking ſcenes to which the attention of the public is now invited been generally known before, the evil could not have grown to its preſent

height, or have exiſted ſo long as it has done. The feelings of every man would have revolted at it, and the ſenſe of the nation (expreſſed, as it would have been, by petitions, and remonſtrances) would have operated upon the legiſlature long before this time. Better, however, it is to make what amends we can for our paſt inattention, by now opening our eyes to this great evil, than ſuffer it to grow to a ſtill greater magnitude; which, in the nature of things, will always be attended with a greater difficulty of redreſs.

Could the preſent ſtate of things have been ſo much as imagined at the commencement of this traffic, it might have been prevented with the greateſt eaſe, as no body would have been intereſted in the continuation of it; whereas at preſent many will think themſelves injured by the juſt and righteous meaſures that it will be neceſſary to take in the caſe. But then, if we wait ſtill longer, and the trade be permitted to go on, and extend itſelf farther, more perſons will be intereſted in it; they will, of courſe, be

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able to make a greater oppoſition to the meaſure; and thus the evil, though g ater, and more juſtly complained of, will be more difficult to remedy than it is now.

I ſhall proceed then to ſtate this caſe as briefly, and as impartially, as I can, and anſwer all the moſt important objections that I have heard made to the propoſed redreſs of the grievance complained of.

Few of you probably imagine, or will readily believe, that, in order to raiſe our ſugar, and other Weſt-India commodities, perhaps half a million of perſons are annually deſtroyed, and in a manner peculiarly ſhocking to humanity. To die by an earthquake, by peſtilence, or even by famine, would be merciful compared with the manner in which many of theſe poor wretches often periſh. All the European plantations taken together are ſaid to require an annual ſupply of ſixty thouſand freſh ſlaves; but theſe are thoſe that remain after ſo many have died in what is called the *ſeaſoning*, before they can be brought to bear the labour to which they are made to ſubmit; and

after ſo many more have been loſt during the voyage, owing to the mode of their confinement, and ill uſage on board, that it is ſaid not leſs than a hundred thouſand are annually exported from Africa. And, ſome ſay, that before this ten are deſtroyed for one that is ſecured, and ſafely lodged on board the ſhips. Certainly, however, many periſh, and many more ſuffer very cruelly before the ſhips can have got their proper number, and be ready for ſailing.

You will aſk *who* are the perſons that are reduced to this wretched ſervitude. I anſwer, ſome criminals, whoſe offences may be ſuppoſed to deſerve it. But theſe, from the nature of things, can only be a few. Others are priſoners taken in war. Thoſe wars, however, are undertaken for the ſake of making the priſoners, and of diſpoſing of them in this manner. But very many are thoſe of their own innocent ſubjects, whom the tyrannical princes of the country violently ſeize upon, and ſell. Great numbers alſo are continually kidnapped by any that can ſurprize and overpower them. And

theſe ſcenes of horror extend above a thouſand miles within land, for a vaſt extent of ſea coaſt. It is ſaid by ſome, that crimes and wars together do not now furniſh one ſlave in an hundred of thoſe that are tranſported to America, they being generally ſuch as are kidnapped, or ſold by their tyrants.

What theſe poor wretches are made to ſuffer while they are conducted to ſuch a diſtance, for ſuch a purpoſe, before they reach the ſhips; what they ſuffer in the ſhips, and in their cruel bondage afterwards, may in ſome meaſure be imagined by us, when we conſider that theſe men have the ſame feelings with ourſelves, and conceive themſelves to be as unjuſtly treated as we ſhould do, if we were violently ſeized, conveyed away from all our friends, and confined to hard labour all our lives in Africa.

In general, it is ſaid, that in our plantations ſlaves are employed ſo many hours every day, excepting Sundays, in the ſervice of their maſters, that they have only one for themſelves, and but little for ſleep. For remiſſneſs in labour they are ſeverely beaten,

and for rebellion (as any attempt to recover their liberty is called) they are generally gibbetted alive. The ſhocking indecencies to which the females are ſubjected during the voyage, and afterwards, and the cruel ſeparation of the neareſt relations and friends, huſbands and wives, parents and children, both when they are put on board the ſhips, and at the place of ſale, would be heard with horror by all but thoſe who are habituated to this traffic.

This buſineſs was begun by the Portugueſe, but the Engliſh entered into it ſo early as the year 1551, though contrary to the expreſs orders of queen Elizabeth; and no Europeans whatever uſe their ſlaves with ſo much cruelty as the Engliſh. The Spaniards have made excellent regulations in their favour, in conſequence of which the ſlaves can work out their own freedom; and the French government has alſo interpoſed by a code of laws enacted for this very purpoſe. But the ſlaves belonging to the Engliſh are almoſt wholly left to the mercy of their maſters; and the annual conſumption

tion of them is itſelf a proof of the moſt cruel uſage. For with good treatment even ſlaves will increaſe, as the Iſraelites did in Egypt, and as theſe very negroes do where their maſters are men of ſenſe and humanity. But for this they have no obligation to our laws.

Conſidering how long this abominable traffic has ſubſiſted, ſurely, my brethren, it is high time to put an end to it. Hitherto the nation in general has been but little apprized of the enormity and extent of this evil; and thoſe who have been intereſted in the continuance and extenſion of it have likewiſe been intereſted to conceal the horrid circumſtances attending it. Conſequently, hitherto, the national guilt has been leſs than it otherwiſe would have been in conniving at it. But now that the eyes of the nation in general are in a great meaſure opened to it, and in the way of being ſtill more ſo, the national guilt will certainly be greater than ever, if an immediate ſtop be not put to a ſpecies of iniquity

which calls ſo loud for the vengeance of heaven.

It may be ſaid that the particulars I have recited are only the *abuſes* of this traffic, and not neceſſarily attendant upon it, and that thoſe only are to be blamed who are concerned in them. But this is a caſe in which all that is worth retaining of the thing itſelf is the abuſe of it. For can you believe that the proper criminals of a part of the African coaſt, or of the whole country of Africa, or indeed of the world (thoſe whoſe crimes could, by any equitable conſtruction, be deemed worthy of ſo ſevere a puniſhment) ſupply our iſlands with ſixty thouſand ſlaves annually, beſides more than an equal number, that periſh in various ways before they can be brought to a ſtate of ſettled uſeful ſervitude. Small, indeed, would be the ſtock, and little would it be worth the while of the planters to encourage this traffic, if it procured them only the criminals of Africa, ſuch as it would be for the intereſt of that country to have baniſhed from it. And

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all the reſt are innocent men, women, and children, unjuſtly deprived of their liberty, and condemned to the moſt cruel bondage, to gratify the avarice of their brutiſh princes, and of our traders and planters. But no leſs guilty are we ourſelves, who, in order to have our ſugars, and other Weſt-India commodities, a little cheaper (though this will be found to be a miſtake) connive at, and encourage, theſe iniquitous proceedings. It is not, therefore, the *abuſe* of a trade, but the *trade itſelf*, that muſt be aboliſhed, if any good be done in the caſe.

It is in vain for the country in general, or ourſelves as a part of it, to pretend innocence, and leave all the guilt upon thoſe who are immediately concerned in this traffic. For while it is not prohibited by public authority, it will of courſe be continued; and you muſt be ſenſible that it cannot be continued without the ſhocking abuſes I have mentioned. The trade itſelf, and the abuſe of it, are ſo connected, that to authorize the one is to authorize the other alſo. And it is an univerſal maxim, that

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he who makes himſelf reſponſible for any meaſure whatever, is reſponſible for all that he believes will be the *actual* conſequences of that meaſure, whether, ſtrictly ſpeaking, they be the *neceſſary* conſequences of it or not.

All the diſtreſs, therefore, that is occaſioned in the country of Africa by the abuſe of power, and the frequent wars in order to procure ſlaves; all the injuſtice continually exerciſed by private individuals to trapan others for that purpoſe; all the barbarities exerciſed towards the poor wretches ſo ſecured, in forcing them on board the ſhips, in keeping them there, and in their ſervitude afterwards; nay all the vices in which the ſlaves are indulged*, all the cruelties exerciſed by them, in their attempts to recover their liberty, and the greater cruelties with which ſuch attempts are always puniſhed, will be laid to the account of the people of this country in general, ſo long as, *knowing*

* See a note in the excellent ſermon preached before the ſociety for the propagation of the goſpel in foreign parts by the preſent Biſhop of London, p. 11, ſmall edition.

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this to be the actual ſtate of things, we ſuffer it to proceed. Both the guilt of the oppreſſors, and the miſery of the oppreſſed, will be equally laid at our door.

This guilt will lie the heavieſt, no doubt, upon miniſters of ſtate, and all thoſe who have the greateſt influence in public meaſures; but a due proportion of it will be imputed to all thoſe who do not exert whatever influence they may have to prevent it; which includes all who do not petition and remonſtrate on the ſubject. For ſo much is what every man may do. This is the leaſt we can do to waſh our hands, and aſſert our innocence.

Some will farther ſay, that there is nothing criminal in *ſervitude itſelf*, that it has been the practice of all nations, and all ages; that it was unqueſtionably allowed in the Old Teſtament, and that, though frequent mention is made of ſlaves, chriſtians and others, in the New Teſtament, there is not even there any cenſure of the practice.

Admitting this, both natural and revealed religion inculcate an humane and equitable

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treatment of all that come under our power. We are ſtill under obligation to do to others as we would that they ſhould do to us, in the ſame circumſtances. And this rule of univerſal juſtice and equity is ſhamefully violated in our preſent practice. Beſides, neither reaſon nor the ſcriptures will authoriſe us to deprive of liberty, thoſe whoſe own crimes, or at leaſt thoſe of their anceſtors, have not forfeited it; and this will go but a very little way to vindicate the ſhocking tranſactions that have been recited.

Moreover, we ſee reaſon enough to infer that ſeveral cuſtoms were permitted in the early ages of mankind, ſuch as polygamy, and divorces, which are no longer lawful; and though there is not in the New Teſtament any expreſs authority for the emancipation of ſlaves, we may eaſily ſee the reaſon of it, as well as that the ſpirit of chriſtianity leads to it. To have preached liberty to all captives, and freedom to all ſlaves, in the age of the apoſtles would have been deemed rebellion againſt the government then eſtabliſhed. We ſee however,

ever, that the ſentiments of chriſtianity, where they have ſpread, have actually operated to the emancipation of ſlaves in a very great part of the weſtern world, which once abounded with them; and thoſe that yet remain in the eaſtern parts of Europe, there is reaſon to think will obtain the ſame favour, and by the ſame means, in due time. Thus Chriſt may be ſaid, in a literal ſenſe, to have *preached liberty to the captives*, by his religion leading to the emancipation of ſlaves.

Chriſtianity teaches us to conſider all mankind as *brethren*, equally the ſubjects of God's moral government here, and alike heirs of immortality hereafter. Now, whether it can be proved that theſe principles neceſſarily lead to the emancipation of ſlaves or not (any more than they lead to take away all inequalities among men, thoſe of rich and poor, maſters and ſervants, &c.) yet they will certainly lead us to give every individual of the human race equal, at leaſt ſufficient, advantages for improving his nature, and preparing for a future ſtate.

In

In this moſt important reſpect the poor and the rich, the maſter and the ſervant, may be equal. But alas! not ſo the ſlave in the Weſt-Indies. It is the intereſt of the maſters, at leaſt they too generally imagine it to be their intereſt, to treat their ſlaves (unchecked by any law) in the ſame manner as they would mere brutes; ſo that they are deprived of every advantage of their rational nature, and are rendered incapable of deriving any benefit from chriſtianity; from which, indeed, too many of the maſters voluntarily deprive themſelves *.

* That it would be for the advantage of maſters and ſlaves, if due attention were given to their inſtruction, cannot be doubted. Let the reader judge of this from the following note to the Biſhop of London's ſermon, quoted before, p. 29. "That ſuch a real and general converſion of the negroes, as is "here propoſed, is no romantic project, but a thing perfectly "practicable; and that it would be highly beneficial both to "the ſlaves and their proprietors is evident from the progreſs "already made in this work by the Moravian miſſionaries. In "the Daniſh iſlands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John, "they have proſelyted near 6,000 negroes. They have alſo a "congregation of ſeveral thouſands in the iſland of Antigua. "This fact has been confirmed to me, very lately, by a clergy-"man who has lived many years in that iſland; and I have "been aſſured by a gentleman of credit, who ſaw them at pub-"lic worſhip, that their deportment was remarkably ſerious, attentive,

Of ſome maſters better things may no doubt with truth be ſaid; but in general, I believe it is true of the ſlaves in the poſſeſſion of the Engliſh, that they have no opportunity of hearing any thing more of chriſtianity than they would have had in the heart of Africa. This certainly ſhould not be permitted by any government which profeſſes to take upon itſelf the eſtabliſhment of the chriſtian religion. For ſurely it will not be maintained, that the object of theſe eſtabliſhments is the mere emolument of the clergy, and not the inſtruction of the ſubjects in the principles of chriſtianity. This is the *profeſſed* end of the ſyſtem, and the

" attentive, devout, and edifying. And they ſo greatly ſur-
" paſs all the other ſlaves in ſobriety, diligence, quietneſs, fide-
" lity, and obedience, that the planters are anxious to have
" their negroes put under the direction of the miſſionaries,
" whom they greatly encourage. In the French iſlands alſo,
" the converſion of the negroes by the Romiſh prieſts and
" miſſionaries is univerſal. The conſequence is, that the
" French ſlaves are much more decent, honeſt, regular, and
" orderly, than thoſe of the Engliſh. If ſuch be the effects
" even of *erroneous* ſyſtems of faith, what might not be expect-
" ed from the doctrines of the church of England, inculcated
" with equal zeal?

proviſion that is made for the clergy is only a means to that end *.

But whether government directly interfere in this buſineſs or not, it ought to remove every impediment in the way of religious inſtruction, and put it in the power of every claſs of men to profit by the doctrines and precepts of chriſtianity, if they pleaſe. If we be chriſtians ourſelves, it will be our endeavour to make others ſo; and there can be no greater evidence of a man being no chriſtian himſelf, than his indifference about extending the bleſſings of chriſtianity to others, and eſpecially thoſe whom providence has committed to his care, his children, his ſervants, and his dependants in general.

But without conſidering men as made for immortality, and capable of the great bleſſings they may derive from chriſtianity, there is ſomething in the principles of *human nature*, that declares againſt ſervitude, and ſhews it to be an improper ſtate for *man*,

* As the Weſt India iſlands are, I believe, within the dioceſe of London, ſhould not the biſhops of that ſee have given particular attention to theſe poor ſouls under their care.

though not for *brute beaſts*. Theſe are capable of being *happy* in a ſtate of ſervitude, ſome of them more ſo than in a ſtate of liberty. The reaſon is that they have little reflexion on the paſt, or anticipation of the future. But man has the power of reflexion in an eminent degree; and it is this that makes him miſerable in a ſtate of ſervitude. Through agony of mind, great numbers of Negroes put an end to their own lives, both before they embark, when they are on ſhip board, and during ſervitude afterwards. And how wretched muſt be many others, who have not the reſolution to come to that horrid extremity. What the planters call the *ſeaſoning* of the ſlaves, depends as much upon the *mind* as upon the *body*. While the thoughts of their country, their relations, and friends, are freſh in their minds, and a ſenſe of their abject condition (ariſing from a compariſon of it with their former ſtate) peculiarly pungent, their health will be precarious, and their lives uncertain. And they will be incapable of any degree of

happineſs in a ſtate of ſervitude, till their feelings are blunted, and they are reduced to a condition nearly approaching that of the brutes. By a continual attention to ſome one thing they become expert in it, but they will be incapable of embracing many other objects.

Some Europeans, finding Negro ſlaves in this wretched degraded condition, to which themſelves have reduced them, have had the aſſurance, and the folly, to pronounce them to be a ſpecies of men greatly inferior to themſelves. But were Europeans treated in the ſame manner a ſufficient length of time, it is demonſtrable that the moſt intelligent of them all would be no better. Thoſe who ſee Negroes in their native country, or in circumſtances of better treatment among ourſelves, are ſatisfied that they are by no means inferior to Europeans in point of underſtanding.

According to the obſervations of a late ingenious traveller, the ancient Egyptians, ſo famed for their wiſdom, were the very ſame people with the preſent Negroes.

There

There is therefore ſomething in the nature and conſtitution of *man* that renders him an improper ſubject of ſervitude. He was made for a better condition, being naturally qualified to enjoy and adorn it; and it is acting contrary to nature, to degrade his condition below the ſtandard of his powers.

Beſides, the maſter of a ſlave is in a ſituation as improper for his nature as the ſlave himſelf. They are both materially injured by the relation. Such a power as that which a maſter exerciſes over a ſlave neceſſarily tends to make him haughty, cruel, and capricious, unfit for the ſociety of his equals, which is the happieſt ſtate of man. Perſons who are bred in the Weſt Indies, and have long been in the habit of being ſerved by ſlaves, are eaſily diſtinguiſhed from other men of the ſame nation. They are not themſelves aware how much their natures are debaſed, and how offenſive their behaviour often is to others. We ſhould by all means then, if we have any idea of the *dignity of human nature*, and if we have

at heart the real intereſt of the maſter, as well as that of the ſlave, put an end to this unnatural and improper diſtinction among thoſe who are partakers of the ſame common nature.

There are ſome who ſay that the Negroes are no leſs ſlaves in their own country than in the Weſt Indies, and that, in many reſpects, their condition is bettered by the removal. Admitting this (which however is far from being true) what right has any man to judge for another, and even to better his condition by force? But the worſt circumſtance in the condition of the Negroes at home is that which has been occaſioned by this traffic, which makes it the intereſt of the powerful to oppreſs the weak. Remove this incentive to tyranny and avarice, and there can be no doubt but the Negroes in Africa will be as well treated as the ſubjects of other arbitrary governments, in which the poor are leaſt liable to be moleſted, and in which it is the intereſt of the ſovereign to protect and befriend his ſubjects, as a father his family. Beſides

political

political ſlavery is a very different thing from *domeſtic*. In the former ſenſe all the Turks may be ſaid to be ſlaves; but they are not ſuch ſlaves as the Negroes in our Weſt-Indies. They have valuable rights, which the ſovereign himſelf holds ſacred, and dares not invade. But what is it that the enſlaved Negro can call his own?

The prodigious waſte of ſlaves is itſelf, as I have obſerved, a proof of their wretched condition, that they are deprived of all the comforts of domeſtic life, and treated no better than horſes, and other cattle, are with us.

Let not then the good ſenſe of Engliſhmen ſuffer their humanity to be reſtrained from exerting itſelf by mere words. Let perſons call things by what *names* they pleaſe, but let *abuſes* of every kind be corrected, let impartial *juſtice* be adminiſtered, and let *mercy* be ſhewn to all that need it; and then a period will be put to this groſſeſt of all abuſes, perhaps the greateſt, and moſt crying evil under the ſun.

Some may ſay that the preſent condition of the Negroes is the fulfilment of an an-

cient prophecy, in which Ham is declared to be the ſervant of Shem and of Japhet. But it is with moſt probability thought that this ancient prophecy relates only to the ſubjugation of the Canaanites, who were deſcended from Ham, or at moſt to that of the Tyrians and Carthaginians, who had in a great meaſure the ſame origin. However, admitting that this caſe is in part the fulfilment of that prophecy, that will not exculpate us in our treatment of the Negroes. It was the intention of the Almighty that Joſeph ſhould be ſold into Egypt, and alſo that our Saviour ſhould be crucified; but the guilt of Joſeph's brethren, and that of the Scribes and Phariſees, was not the leſs for that circumſtance. Beſides, the ſcriptures have been abundantly fulfilled in the caſe of the ſubjection of the deſcendants of Ham. And as God appoints no evil for its own ſake, but with a view to a greater good, ſo it has pleaſed his wiſe providence to provide remedies for all evils, which operate in their proper time. It may, therefore, be hoped, that the ſervitude of the

Negroes

Negroes is drawing near to its completion; and perhaps their future condition may be as happy as their preſent is calamitous. It is not ſaid that the poſterity of Ham ſhall *always* be ſlaves. When the happy time ſhall come that *the wolf ſhall lie down with the lamb*, when the world ſhall be a ſcene of univerſal peace (which the ſure word of prophecy certifies to us, and the preſent ſtate of things makes highly probable) it may be preſumed that ſervitude alſo will be at an end, and the diſtinction of *maſter* and *ſlave* exiſt no more.

Some ſay that if we abandon the ſlave trade we give up a valuable ſource of national profit, and yield it to our rivals. Should this be the caſe, ſtill a chriſtian nation ſhould not heſitate to do what is *right* in itſelf. A trade ſo circumſtanced as this may juſtly be termed *wicked*, and *unlawful*, ſuch as no advantage can juſtify. Alſo, with nations as with individuals, *honeſty is ultimately the beſt policy*.

I apprehend, however, that we ſhall be far from being loſers by ceaſing to trade with

with Africa for *men*. The ſame people, for the ſake of the ſame commodities for which they commit ſuch horrid outrages on one another, would certainly do any thing elſe to procure them; and the country is fruitful of products which might be of more value to us than all the ſlaves we bring from thence. In a country of that vaſt extent, if we favoured the civilization of it, as by our intercourſe we might do, inſtead of contributing to keep it in that ſtate of ſavage barbarity in which it is at preſent, the inhabitants, having already a fondneſs for many of our commodities, would ſoon arrive at a ſtate in which they would want more of them. If we only give them an idea of a better condition than they at preſent enjoy, they will ſoon find the means of obtaining it. If the Negroes are lazy at home (though they who aſſert this can with little decency maintain that their condition is bettered by ſlavery) it is becauſe they have no motive to exert themſelves. Their wants are few, and eaſily ſupplied. But people inhabiting climates as hot as theirs

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are laborious and civilized, giving and receiving the greateſt benefits by their commercial intercourſe with various other nations. There can be no doubt, therefore, but that, were this barbarous ſlave trade aboliſhed, and the civilization of Africa promoted, for one bale of any kind of goods that we now ſend to it, we ſhould ſoon ſend many, and in a much greater variety; ſo that the manufacturers of this country in general would find a great benefit from a change of the ſyſtem, and not one of them would be a loſer.

Some will ſay how ſhall we get ſugar, and the other products of the Weſt-India iſlands, now raiſed by ſlaves, if ſlavery be aboliſhed. I anſwer, our firſt care ſhould be to *do juſtice*, and *ſhow mercy*, let what will become of the ſuperfluities, or even the neceſſaries, of life. But I would aſk, how did we do before we had brought ourſelves into this unnatural ſituation? There was then no want of ſugar, or of ſome ſubſtitute for it, though the uſe of this luxury was not then ſo common. Let every thing

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for the uſe of man be raiſed by men who ſhall be paid the full price of their labour, and let thoſe who cannot pay that price go without it, as they do with reſpect to other things.

Beſides, it is demonſtrable that we may have ſugar, and every other commodity that we now raiſe by means of ſlaves, even cheaper, without ſlaves; either by encouraging the culture of them in Africa, and other ſuitable climates *, and purchaſing them there with our own proper commodities (without the expence of ſettling and defending plantations of our own) or even by the labour of free-men in thoſe plantations. Aboliſh ſlavery, and the labour now performed by ſlaves will not be conſidered as diſgraceful.

It is ſaid that the Quakers, who from the pureſt principles of humanity and chriſti-

* Mr. Oſborne, who was employed in the negociation of the late peace, aſſured me, that ſugar might be raiſed in Africa, by the labour of free negroes, and be ſold in London, at one-half the price that we now give for it; but that it would be neceſſary to ſecure the favour of the chiefs by preſents from government. He had had a plantation of his own in that country, on which he employed, as nearly as I can remember, three hundred negroes.

anity manumitted their ſlaves, found, even to their ſurprize, that they gained more by their ſervice as freemen, when they paid them wages, than they did by them as ſlaves, when they gave them no wages at all; the Negroes laboured ſo much more chearfully, and did ſo much more work, when freemen than when ſlaves.

At all events, let ſervitude be aboliſhed, and leave it to the ingenuity and induſtry of our countrymen to find a ſubſtitute for it. When things are brought into a complex and unnatural ſtate, it is not eaſy to revert to that which is proper and natural: but in time it will be done. And perhaps the immediate emancipation of all ſlaves would be an improper, becauſe in fact no humane meaſure. Thoſe who have been long ſlaves would not know how to make a proper uſe of freedom. But if a ſtop was put to the farther importation of ſlaves, it would immediately become the intereſt of the maſters to make the moſt of their preſent ſtock, and conſequently to treat their ſlaves with more humanity; ſo that in time their condition

condition would be the ſame with that of the *villeins* in the Feudal times of this country; and by degrees approach to that of *freemen*. Or freedom might be placed within the reach of the more induſtrious of the ſlaves, as it is with the Spaniards and French; and the man who ſhall have worked himſelf free would know how to make a proper uſe of his freedom, and would be prepared to make a valuable member of ſociety. However, to take the moſt prudent meaſures in the caſe muſt be left to the wiſdom of parliament. Ours is to expreſs our good wiſhes in the cauſe, and by our zeal to excite them to do what they ſhall deem the moſt proper.

What is propoſed to be done by England is already done in Virginia, Delaware, and Rhode Iſland, and is likely to take place in all the States of America*. It will be an

* One of the North American provinces, as they then were (I think it was New-York) ſome time before the commencement of the American war, paſſed a law againſt the importation of ſlaves, but on account of the oppoſition made to it by ſome merchants in England it was not confirmed in the Privy Council of this country. Shall we ſay that the government which will have *ſlaves* does not deſerve to have *ſubjects*?

honour

honour to this country, and the moſt glorious event in the preſent reign, if the example ſhould be followed here. It will be honourable to every perſon in proportion to the ſhare he ſhall have in bringing it about. But in this we muſt all give place to the Quakers, who were the firſt to ſhew themſelves friends to the rights of humanity; and what is more, who were the firſt to decline any advantage which they, in common with others, might have derived from this inhuman traffic with our own ſpecies.

With Engliſhmen I may be allowed to argue from that *love of liberty* by which they profeſs to be actuated. For ſurely we are not ſuch ſelfiſh beings, as to wiſh to engroſs every thing valuable. If we have any ſentiments of benevolence, or ſenſe of common equity, we ſhall wiſh to ſee every thing extended to others that we covet for ourſelves. As we Engliſhmen, then, would leaſt brook the condition of the Negroes in our plantations, we ought to have the moſt compaſſion for them, and, remote as they are from us in ſituation and condition, we

ſhould

ſhould conſider them as brethren and neighbours, and therefore exert ourſelves to the utmoſt for their relief.

Engliſhmen are alſo no leſs renowned for their *generoſity* than for their love of liberty. Our charities, for every deſcribable human want, are far more numerous than thoſe of any other nation in the world. They have often been extended to ſtrangers as well as to natives. Let the ſame principle operate on this occaſion, than which none can more loudly call for it. If thoſe be the moſt proper objects of generoſity who ſtand in the moſt need of it (and according to my text we ſhould conſider ourſelves as *neighbours* to all thoſe to whom we have an opportunity of acting a neighbourly or friendly part) none can ſtand to us in that relation more nearly than the wretched Negroes; no part of the human race ſuffering more, or more unjuſtly; or who have it leſs in their power to help themſelves. As their complaints cannot even be heard by thoſe who have the power to relieve them, and they are, indeed, utterly ignorant of the exiſtence

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of any ſuch power on earth, *we* ſhould make their complaints, and urge their pleas for them. As it is in our power to give them *this* aſſiſtance, we are in duty bound to do it. For it is an univerſal truth, that the *obligation* to do a good office ever accompanies the *power* of doing it. Where God gives the one, he requires the other.

I think myſelf peculiarly happy that, in recommending the relief of the diſtreſſed African ſlaves, I can join heartily with every denomination of chriſtians in the country, the catholics, the members of the eſtabliſhment, and diſſenters of all denominations. This is not the cauſe of unitarianiſm, of arianiſm, or of trinitarianiſm, but ſimply that of *humanity*, and our common *chriſtianity*; and as I have frequently, and with peculiar pleaſure, obſerved, all the articles on which we differ are trifling compared to thoſe with reſpect to which all chriſtians are, and ever have been, agreed.

We all believe in the obligation of the moral duties of life; we all believe in the divine miſſion of Chriſt, in a righteous

providence of God here, and in a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments hereafter; and theſe are the only things that are of real efficacy in religion. Other things, indeed, have their value, and great value; but it is of a kind far inferior to this. They may recommend our religion to thoſe who are not much diſpoſed to receive it, and they may lead us to contemplate it with more ſatisfaction ourſelves, as more agreeable to to reaſon, and the ſcriptures (and no real friend of revelation can wiſh to ſee theſe things at variance) but any ſpecies of chriſtianity, really believed, and acted upon, will make men ſober, benevolent, and pious; good friends, and good neighbours, kind and uſeful in all the relations of life, entirely reſigned to the will of God, and diſpoſed to cooperate in all that he ſhall recommend to us.

Had the infinitely ſuperior importance of theſe great articles of chriſtian faith, which immediately reſpect, and effectually ſecure, the great object of chriſtianity *(which brings life and immortality to light,* and which was given *to bleſs mankind*

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in turning them from their iniquities) the eſtabliſhment of other articles, which have little or no relation to this great object, would not have been ſo eagerly contended for. It would have been thought ſufficient to enforce the belief of ſuch things as really diſtinguiſh chriſtians from other men; and that with reſpect to things of leſs moment, all chriſtians might be permitted to think and act as they pleaſed, provided they gave no diſturbance to their neighbours. Upon this reaſonable plan, *truth* would have its proper advantage over error; whereas at preſent, whatever *errors* may happen to be eſtabliſhed, being ſupported by *power*, their reign (as in the days of popiſh darkneſs and ſuperſtition) will be greatly prolonged. But it is, no doubt, for the beſt, that truth ſhould have an opportunity of triumphing, as we may be confident it will, in circumſtances the moſt unfavourable to its propagation. In ſimilar circumſtances was chriſtianity itſelf at its firſt promulgation. Let us, then, think no more than may be neceſſary of the things on which we differ,

which tends to create diſlike, and as much as poſſible on thoſe with reſpect to which we are agreed, which may promote mutual candour, love, and affection.

It ſeems to be the intention of Divine Providence, that every thing ſhould be brought to perfection by degrees. If we have any faith in hiſtory and prophecy, the laſt age of the world is to be infinitely preferable to any thing that we have yet experienced; and certainly the preſent ſtate of things is preferable to any that is paſt. By means of chriſtianity chiefly, the great governor of the world is gradually bringing on a ſtate of univerſal peace and happineſs, which muſt, as I have obſerved, imply the abolition of ſlavery, as well as of every other evil. But God works by *inſtruments*; and his inſtruments in things that reſpect mankind, are chiefly men.

Let us then conſider ourſelves as being *workers together with God*, in bringing about an improved ſtate of things, in bettering the condition of our ſpecies, and extending the juſt rights of humanity to all

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our race; thus recommending the goſpel which we all profeſs, that goſpel which is calculated to bring *peace upon earth, and good will to men,* and which, when it ſhall be univerſally received and obeyed, will make all mankind righteous and happy. Thus it will make even this world a real paradiſe, and fit us for a ſtate of greater glory and happineſs in another.

A PRAYER.

A PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY, and ever-bleſſed God, who haſt *of one blood made all nations of men, to dwell upon the face of all the earth, and haſt determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation*; who art equally the God, and the *father, of all the families of the earth*, and who art *the refuge of the oppreſſed*; extend thy compaſſion, we beſeech thee, to all thine offspring, and our brethren, of mankind.

Do thou, *in whoſe hand are the hearts of all men, and who turneſt them, as the rivers of water, which way ſoever thou pleaſeſt*, awaken in the minds of all who are at eaſe, a due feeling for the miſerable; that thoſe who have the power to do it, may *looſe all the bands of wickedneſs, undo all heavy burdens, let the oppreſſed go free, and break every unjuſt yoke*; and may the great bleſſings which, by thy favour, we enjoy, be equally ſhared by all the human race.

More eſpecially, may thoſe of our ſpecies who, in any part of the world, are outwardly in the condition of brute beaſts, but who are often inwardly more afflicted than brute beaſts are capable of being, be reſtored to the common rights of humanity; and by the bleſſings of civilization, and equitable government, may they be prepared to receive the ſuperior advantages of chriſtianity, in the knowledge of thy truth, and the proſ-

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pect of a happy immortality, as revealed to mankind by thy ſon Jeſus Chriſt; that by means of the glad tidings of the goſpel, they may be *turned from darkneſs to light, receiving the forgiveneſs of ſins, and an inheritance among them that are ſanctified.* Thus may the kingdom of thy ſon be extended, and fill the whole earth.

To prepare the way for thoſe glorious times, when the goſpel ſhall be univerſally received, remove from it thoſe corruptions and abuſes, which ſtill, alas! too generally, and too cloſely, adhere to it, ſo as greatly to obſtruct its progreſs. But, above all, may thoſe who profeſs it, be careful to adorn it by a ſuitable life and converſation, that *others, ſeeing their good works, may glorify thee their father in heaven.* And may it not be our condemnation, a condemnation greater than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Tyre and Sidon, in the day of judgment, that *light is come into the world, but that we have loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe our deeds were evil.*

May we ſhew the value we have for the bleſſings of chriſtianity, by our exertions both to free it from every thing that debaſes it, and to impart it, thus purified from baſe alloy, to others; being the inſtruments in thy hand of diffuſing truth, virtue, and happineſs through the world.

Bleſs our native country. May we continue to ſhare thy favour, in the enjoyment of

of our liberties, civil and religious; and in conſequence of making a ſuitable improvement of our many advantages, may we be *that happy people whoſe God is the Lord.* If any individuals of our nation, from an inordinate love of gain, have been guilty of injuſtice and oppreſſion, above thoſe of other nations, may the generoſity of others be rouſed to greater exertions, in order to put a ſtop to it; and, as far as poſſible, may reparation be made for paſt wrongs, by our ſuperior regard to equity and humanity in future time.

Bleſs thy ſervant our ſovereign; *eſtabliſh his throne in righteouſneſs,* and make his reign a bleſſing to the lateſt poſterity. May it be diſtinguiſhed by every thing that can render a reign truly illuſtrious, and memorable; by the extenſion of ſcience, of arts, manufactures, and commerce, as the ſource of national proſperity, but ſtill more by the greater purity of chriſtian faith, by removing every impediment in the way of a farther reformation, and extending the bleſſings of civilization and true religion to the moſt diſtant parts of the earth.

Hear us, gracious God, we intreat thee, in theſe our requeſts, as far as ſhall be agreeable to thy infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. We aſk it as the diſciples of thy ſon Jeſus Chriſt, through whom, to thee, O Father, the *only living and true God,* be aſcribed everlaſting praiſes. Amen.